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**Berlin Childhood Years**  
**A Personal Record**  
**by**  
**Werner M. Jacobsohn**

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**Dedicated to the memory of my Mother , Anni , who  
wanted to write this story but somehow never got  
around to it, and to my wife, Clara, who  
encouraged me to do it, and made constructive  
suggestions.**

**It is also dedicated to my sons Frederick and  
Stephen who enjoyed a much better childhood.**



**I greatly appreciate the help of  
Professor Hy Kleinman,  
Sarah Lawrence College (ret.)  
for his help in correcting the many  
errors in my original writing.**



## FORWARD

This is an attempt at an autobiography of my life in Germany. As will be seen, it was filled with trauma from age 6 onward. Much of what I have experienced, I would rather forget, but because of the very special nature of my experiences in living through World War II and surviving Hitler's Germany, I feel that my sons, and perhaps their children, are entitled to have a record of what transpired. I am not a writer, and this is not a literary effort.

I am going to try to present my history as factual and unemotionally as possible. For the time being I will confine myself to my own personal story. The general history of the era has been covered in great detail by many others. While much of what has been written is unquestionable, at least historically correct, much has been written by outsiders whose knowledge is second hand, and whose motif was primarily to publish a book and facts were only coincidental.

This work was written over a period of time which extended from November of 1985 to April of 1987, and updated occasionally thereafter as I remembered things of importance. I worked on it a little at a time as my schedule permitted, and as I found myself in the frame of mind to recollect the experiences of those years. Obviously this is just an outline of my experiences, and many details have been omitted. While I have no desire to exploit this material economically, at least for the present, my wife or children may, if they wish, consider that at some future time. In line with this thinking I have copyrighted this paper to prevent any unauthorized use.



A few weeks before I was born my mother and her mother in law were strolling along Berlin's famous Kurfuersten Damm when they encountered Gypsies who were soliciting passersby to predict the future. My mother told my grandmother: "Lets get out of here, I don't want to hear anything." As they hurried away a Gypsie woman shouted after my mother: "You don't have to run away, you will have a handsome son."

Be that as it may, I was born into a financially comfortable family. My first home and place of birth was a very large apartment on the second floor of Jenaer Strasse 16 in the Wilmersdorf district of Berlin. As was not unusual in those days I was delivered at home rather than in a clinic, primarily, I believe, because my mother feared that I might be accidentally exchanged after birth. I had a baby nurse, in addition to the family maid and cleaning woman.

My father was a lawyer and also co-owned a wholesale perfume, export and import business together with his brother in law, which was named A. Bornstein & Co. My father was a member and treasurer of a Jewish boating club, named Alt Brandenburg, located on the shores of the Müggelsee in the eastern outskirts of Berlin. I remember this time as the only carefree time of my childhood. I loved the boating trips I took with my parents on weekends around the beautiful waterways of the area. Many times, the members with larger boats would invite us to go on joint



excursions. I had companions to play with and enjoyed the games we played looking out from below decks.

On weekends we usually slept over at the club where my father owned a room on the top floor. The physical environment of the club was idyllic. There was an excellent dining room for the members, huge old trees around which we children could roam by the water's edge. There also was what I seem to remember as an enormous terrace where the grown-ups met to lounge and discuss the day's politics. The terrace, shaded by giant old chestnut trees, overlooked the lake, and was right above the dining room. It was on this terrace that we children first heard the names of foreign lands far, far away. The adults were talking about leaving Germany for what was then Palestine, America, England, Australia and many other places. Some people soon did leave, and many acquaintances and friends said good-bye forever.

The Heinemanns, good friends of my parents (he owned a chemical factory, she was an ophthalmologist) went to Brazil with their only son Peter with whom I had spent many an hour playing and riding in his parent's sizeable sailboat.

My father one day came up with a Baedecker (travel guide) of South Africa, but friends ridiculed him for wanting to go into the wild bush. Most of those who ridiculed him left Germany soon thereafter. I also remember him taking a trip to England with a view to going there. He brought back nice presents for my mother and me, but somehow we stayed in Berlin.



This lack of urgency was probably due to the fact that my father was a combat veteran of World War I and had been severely wounded by a bullet through the chest. He left the army as a decorated first lieutenant. My father seems to have believed that no one would do him any harm under those circumstances.

We moved from the large six room apartment where I had been born, first to another fairly nice apartment on the nearby Waghaeusler Strasse 12 where we stayed only a couple of years, then to Spichern Strasse 7, which was still fairly nice. I did not understand the reasons for the moves at the time, but they were brought about by the political conditions which adversely affected my father's law practice and business interests. His clients included many Gentiles, as well as banks, which he lost when Hitler came to power.

At one point the Gestapo came to our home and confiscated my parents' passports. This seems to have been caused by some business disagreement with a gentile supplier who denounced my father. The aggravation of this incident was probably one of the contributing factors which led to the end of my carefree childhood.

It was during the Olympiad in 1936 that my world started to come crashing down. On the 28th of July my father had promised to take me to the inner city of Berlin to show me the festooned streets which were flag draped for the Olympiad. My parents and I had lunch together. My father complained of a headache and wanted to take a short nap before taking



me downtown. When the nap took too long, my mother went to wake him up. I heard her call his name many times, louder and louder. The girl from the office, which had been relocated into our apartment, came to help, a doctor was called, but it was too late.

Even though I was only six and one quarter years old at the time, I remember the events very well. I remember the doctor walking through the living room where I was sitting forlornly on a chair standing by the wall. He asked my mother if I was the only child; and when she confirmed this, he urged her not to cry in front of me. It was advice that my mother could not bring herself to heed, and I was witness to many tearful scenes. Various relatives who could do so, came for the funeral. Intermittently I was sent to homes of friends of my parents who were not very adept at understanding a six year old in that predicament.

On the day of my father's funeral the lady (Mahle) who had been my father's and his sisters' nurse maid came to stay with me. She was a wonderful soul and tried to console me, even though she must have been pained by the early passing of someone she had helped raise. She would later die in Auschwitz.

Initially I did not really accept my father's death, or even comprehend death at all. I somehow believed that someday my father would come back to us. On my way to and from school I would pass a private clinic, and I convinced myself that my father was in there and that I would meet him coming out of there. I remember going with my mother to one of Berlin's



coffee-houses to meet one of our female relatives; I am not sure who it was. As we were sitting there my mother remarked that someone had walked in who resembled my father. I blurted out that perhaps it was Daddy. The lady was quite taken aback by my comment and started to tell my mother that I should not be saying things like that. I remember my mother explaining to her somewhat surreptitiously that I had not yet understood.

From time to time my mother would go to the cemetery to visit my father's grave, and I would be left with the maid or friends. I kept pressing my mother to take me there; and though she refused at first, I finally went. I suppose it must have been in the Spring of 1937, since there was still no gravestone on my father's grave. That evening I became quite ill, though there was nothing physically wrong with me. The reality of my father's permanent leave had finally sunk in.

I had started elementary school in the Spring of 1936; and since under the Nazi laws of 1933 Jewish children were no longer permitted in public schools, I attended the Joseph Lehmann Schule of the Jewish Reform Community of Berlin. The school was located at Joachimsthaler Strasse 13. I did fairly well studying mythology, ancient history along with the customary "3 Rs." Hebrew and Religion were, of course, part of the curriculum. English was started in the second year. I learned fairly easily and had an almost photographic memory. I could learn some of the German classic poems in one or two readings. Other kids were driven to tears by some of these difficult poems. Actually I made much use of my



memory by doing little studying and relying on memory to see me through. Later I wished only that this ability had been put to use learning more important things. One of my favorite subjects was music and while we kids did not realize it then, the nazi policies provided us with an outstanding teacher. Dr. Ludwig Misch was a performing artist and musicologist who after the Nazis forced him from the stage, had to earn his living teaching elementary school. He introduced us to many of the classics, singing, playing the piano as well as the organ. Since he was married to a Gentile he was able to survive, enduring the usual hardships. After the war he came to New York where he taught at Columbia. I had the pleasure of meeting him there years later.

During the summer months my mother and I still went to the boat club, but the boat had been put up for sale and was soon gone. That was a bitter pill to accept, even though I understood that we could not use the boat without my father. But things were not the same at the club. In addition to the absence of some of the kids I had played with, I found many of the adults unfriendly even hostile. When some of us kids got into some kind of trouble, it was usually I who got blamed, often quite unjustly. But it was easier to pick on a kid who had no father to take his grievances to.

I experienced similar things in school. Teachers were much more prone to harass a student who had no father. I remember one day when one of the sterner disciplinarians worked me over in front of the class in an effort to have me tell him which of the kids had been causing a ruckus in the hallway. I protested that I had not been among them. He told me that



he knew that but that I was to tell him who had done it. I did not tell and got a good beating until some of the other kids started to protest. Some of the other children's parents later called my mother to advise her to do something. She never did because the times then were not good for such conflicts. But I am convinced that this whole thing would not have happened had my father been alive. There was one memorable gentleman among our teachers: Gustav Phillipson was in his late twenties, robust, full of fun, and all of us adored him. He was the sole shining example of a great teacher at the school. He was engaged to be married to a Miss Spitzer who taught the girls' class. Miss Spitzer was ready to emigrate to Cuba, and Phillipson was to follow as soon as she could make the arrangements. Shortly after Miss Spitzer left, Phillipson was picked up by the Gestapo and sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp which was located near Berlin. No explanation was given for his arrest. Several weeks passed without a word, then the news came that he had died of an "embolism." All of us were heartbroken, many of the children cried quite openly. It is probably correct to state that all meaningful education at our school died along with him.

My mother continued to run the perfume import-export business from our apartment on Spichern Strasse with two gentile employees. Because she was representing French and English firms, the Nazis did not interfere in that part of the business for the time being. We were also allowed to retain our gentile housekeeper since ours was a one parent household.

For a couple of summers I went to what was then considered camp.



First to a place near Munich which was really a large villa run by a retired or semiretired pediatrician, Professor Benjamin. The environment was stern, almost abusively so. The doctor would scream at children and punish them for the smallest transgressions. My grandmother's sister and her husband who lived in Munich came to visit me there. The visit was supervised by one of Benjamin's employees. The box of chocolates they had brought me was confiscated for 'safekeeping,' and I never received a single piece of it. As it was, there was very little to occupy our time. The following year I went to a place near Freiburg in the Black Forest to a camp called Sonnenhalde, run by a Jewish woman. My mother took me to both places personally. On the way to the camp in Freiburg we did some sightseeing, climbing atop the Freiburger Muenster (cathedral) which offered a spectacular view of the French Vosges mountains, as well as the Black Forest. Camp consisted of playing games, hiking, picking berries in the forest, and some gardening. Camp was hardly an endearing experience, but it must be said in all fairness that activities were probably restricted by the political situation.

There were also a number of trips to my grandparents in Fulda, both before and after my father's death. I enjoyed hanging out in my grandfather's soft goods store. My grandmother, unfortunately, was a very nervous woman, and we did not get along very well. If I was home with her I would get on the phone and call my grandfather who would dispatch one of his employees to bring me to the store.

My grandmother kept a rigorously kosher home, and would say her



prayers a couple of times a day. My grandfather would often poke good-natured fun at her for all this religious fervor. Fulda which was also the capital of German Catholicism had an ultraorthodox Jewish community. Temple attendance on holidays and Friday evenings was de rigeur. I remember sitting with my grandmother and sometimes my mother in the balcony of the temple; the men would be on the main floor. Jewish stores in Fulda were never open on Saturdays or Jewish holidays. My grandparents had a full time gentile maid, Martha, and life there was pretty good. A couple of times I went with Martha to the beautiful Dom (cathredal) for service. The Dom was founded in the eighth century and contains the crypt of Saint Bonifacius. My grandmother was a fantastic cook and would prepare my favorites. It was the only proof I ever found that kosher cuisine can be excellent! At one point a woman who worked in my grandfather's store, whom my grandmother had admonished about something or other, filed a complaint against my grandmother with the nazi party. My grandfather was able to smooth things out and get the employee to withdraw the complaint. This was an early omen of things to come.

On weekends we would take walks in and around Fulda which was a beautiful town and had very picturesque surroundings which included the Rhön mountains. The only problem was that I had no children to play with. Most of the people my grandparents associated with were of the older generation. In fact I think that just about all of the younger Jewish people had left Fulda, so I was rather bored.

After my father's death, my mother tried to spend the Jewish holidays in



Fulda. I well remember a seder in 1938. It was to be the last time I saw my grandfather alive. When we returned to our apartment in Berlin, our gentile housekeeper, Vera, had committed suicide by turning on the gas in the kitchen stove - her boyfriend and what she had hoped was a prospective husband, had turned out to be married!! Fortunately, the taxi driver who had brought us home from the railroad station, and who had brought up our luggage, helped us get into the apartment which Vera had chained. He was also an important witness to the events when the police arrived. A little while later Vera's parents came to visit my mother. They apologized for the problems their daughter had caused, and said that she should have taken a piece of rope and gone into the woods!

My grandfather suffered a heart attack on April 27, 1938 and died instantly. There was talk that the Nazis would force him to give up his business, which he considered his life, and which he had spent his life to build. My mother went to Fulda while I stayed with the Jewish housekeeper who had taken the place of the gentile one. My grandmother tried to run the business for a while together with the employees, but she was not very adept at that sort of thing, and the political climate, even worse in a small town did not help. In Berlin things continued pretty much the same: my mother was fairly successful running the perfume business, and I continued my schooling.

Sometime during this period my mother made the acquaintance of one Heinrich Loewensohn. Loewensohn had been a young lawyer in Germany, but as an ardent Zionist had gone to what was then Palestine. He became a lawyer there and occupied himself with immigration law,



ostensibly trying to help German Jews to come to Palestine. He was a British subject by virtue of Palestine being a British mandate, and thus could travel into and out of Germany arranging contacts. At this time and actually until about 1942 it was possible for Jews to go to Palestine providing they had money in a Palestinian bank. My mother and grandmother always seemed to have lots of cash which stemmed from the fact that grandfather David was an inveterate nontaxpayer! He therefore had lots of cash which came in quite handy under the circumstances we were to encounter, though also very dangerous, since we were not allowed to have it. Loewinsohn persuaded my mother to deposit money in a Palestinian bank. The cash was taken out of Germany by the husband of one of my mother's childhood girlfriends. Norbert Stahl had left Germany in the twenties for Sweden. Somehow he managed to travel back and forth between Sweden and Germany on a diplomatic courier passport, and took the money to Sweden where it was sent to the Anglo-Palestine bank. From that point on our departure to Palestine was to be just a matter of weeks or months. It was impossible to inquire directly about the money which had been sent to Palestine, since the Gestapo opened and read all foreign correspondence. And of course it was strictly illegal to have a foreign bank account.

The next drastic change came on November 10, 1938, the infamous Kristallnacht had occurred the night before. Apparently we did not know about it on the morning of November 10, for I went to school as usual. The night before virtually all stores owned by Jews had been sacked and looted by the Nazis, the synagogues had been torched, and many adult



Jewish men had been arrested and taken to a variety of concentration camps, a fate which few escaped altogether. My school was spared since it was wedged between two apartment buildings, and could not be torched without endangering the two adjoining buildings.

When school was out, I was surprised to find my mother waiting for me. It was only about a ten minute walk home, but on that day my mother did not want me to go home alone. She explained what had happened, and also warned me that we had several male guests at home, and I was to tell no one about that. When we got home there were a number of acquaintances of my mother's at our home who would stay there for quite a few days. When they had first heard about the roundup of Jewish men, they had calculated correctly that the police would not come to our apartment, since there was no man in the house. Most of the men who had managed "not to be home" during the first week or so of the dragnet, were spared the ordeal. Some men who had served in the military during the first world war considered themselves exempt from this action, a delusion which would soon vanish.

I remember that during this time we went to the house of my father's cousin Curt Gruenberg, a successful, self-employed electrical engineer, to help celebrate his birthday. I seem to remember that it may have been his fiftieth. After dinner we were sitting in their living room when the door bell rang. My mother commented that she could not stand the sound of door bells, and someone, it may have been Curt, responded that it had to ring if someone wanted to visit. He went to answer the doorbell and was



confronted by two Gestapo agents, who arrested him. Fortunately the other men at the party were foreign nationals and were not arrested. One was Curt's brother-in-law who was Hungarian, the only other one I remember was the husband of Curt's sister Kaete who was a French national. I suppose that the only reason that only two other men were present may have been that all other male friends, like Curt's other brother in law, had already been arrested. Curt was released after a few weeks and managed to go to England where he did quite well and remained until his death, more than a couple of decades later. One of the people who also went to a concentration camp was the husband of Curt's sister Carola. At the camp he met a musician who, of course, could no longer perform in public. To earn some money Leo Leiserowitsch taught privately. He had trained as violinist under Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, a nephew of Felix Mendelssohn. Leo had had an orchestra of his own and played at a cafe in the fashionable Berlin Hotel Adlon. Leo was married to a gentile and had a daughter raised in the Christian faith. While this was considered a "mixed privileged" marriage, it had not saved him at that time from the roundup. As the outcome of the acquaintance, however, Carola started to take accordion lessons, and ultimately I started accordion lessons with Leo. The reason I am detailing this, is that Leo would ultimately play a major role in our survival.

My grandmother's store was sacked as well, and she never reopened. Other Jewish stores were sold, a few reopened for a little while longer. My mother made several futile attempts to emigrate, but it was especially difficult for a single woman; and I doubt that my mother would have left



without her mother. More friends left all the time, and everyone's effort to leave Germany became more frantic. Three of my closer school friends left for Shanghai, Chile, and the U.S. respectively. That left me with essentially two playmates, a boy two years my senior who with his father occupied the apartment above ours and a pretty blonde, blue eyed, girl Steffie Frisch close to my age who occupied the apartment below ours. There was also another pretty blonde, Steffie Salinger who lived with her parents across the street, all would later perish in concentration camps.

The trap was really sprung in September of 1939 when Hitler's troops invaded Poland and thus started World War II. The fast pace of Hitler's victory over Poland and the other European countries was frightening in that it cut off the escape routes some had been able to take, and at the same time underlined the inability of the other nations of Europe to deal with this maniac. It thus portended that there would be no rapid end to the Third Reich.

At one point during this time my mother and I attended a private chamber concert at the apartment of a Leo Lustig. Lustig had been a musician deprived of all income, so a few musicians gave this concert to raise a little bit of money for him. The only piece I remember from this concert is Schubert's Trout Quintet. Leo played the second violin, and the pianist was a lady by the name of Grete Sultan. It was her farewell performance just before leaving for the USA. After we came to New York, years later, I noticed her name in a couple of concert advertisements, but then we could not afford to go to concerts.



In Berlin war preparations were intense. Air raid shelters were built in the basements of buildings, civil defense demonstrations (as for instance how to deal with an incendiary bomb) were presented in public locations. Air raid drills were ordered. Measures against the Jews in particular included the confiscation of radios, jewelry, and other valuables. Identification cards were issued to everybody. Those issued to Jews displayed a Mogen David, and all Jews had to adopt a Jewish middle name, mostly Israel for males, and Sara for females, unless one's given name was one of these or was obviously Jewish. Failure to use the Jewish middle name in all formalities could land one in a concentration camp. I had to report to the local police precinct on my tenth birthday to be issued my identification card. The identity card displayed a large "J" inside and outside. I had to have this in my possession at all times. Another measure was that Jews could only be treated by Jewish doctors, and Jewish doctors could only treat Jews. This did not make points with much of the poorer Christian population, many of whom had enjoyed low cost or even free medical aid from dedicated Jewish physicians.

Many Jews were ordered into forced labor (defense work) in one of Berlin's many industrial concerns. My mother managed to stay out of forced labor for the time being on account of being a single parent and also due to her very high blood pressure. Her business deals with France ended, however, with the onset of the war. As another measure against the Jewish population, all Jews were evicted from any building which had not been owned by Jews. Since the house in the Spichern Strasse



belonged to an insurance company, we were forced to move. We moved into what was in fact a town house in the fashionable Tiergarten section of Berlin, Victoria Strasse 32. The luxurious villa had belonged to a Jewish banker (Wolf). His daughter still lived there, married to a retired Jewish doctor (Levine), who ironically had saved Hitler's life as an army doctor during the first world war and thereby earned a derogatory comment in *Mein Kampf* for his troubles. Both were later sent to Theresienstadt where they perished. The second floor of the villa was occupied by a large law firm, and the third floor was used by the superior command of the Heer (army). This led me to a very funny incident: During the summer (1940) I spent a good deal of time hanging around the court yard of the building. One day a high army officer in a uniform with pink lapels and a monocle in one eye arrived at the building. I said Good Morning to him and inquired as to whom he was looking for. He turned to me and hollered "Heil Hitler is the German salute, you as a Hitler Junge should know that". He then asked me where the command offices were located. I directed him and properly saluted with Heil Hitler, which obviously pleased him as he announced: "That is already much better." I still do not know how I kept a straight face, but I probably was too scared to smile.

During this time I also got my only live view of Hitler. The Potsdamer Strasse which paralleled Victoria Strasse one block to the East, was a main thoroughfare and led to the Sportspalast, the scene of many of Hitler's diatribes. The tide on the Russian front had begun to turn against Germany, and Hitler wanted to assure the Germans that everything was going just great. I happened to be walking towards Potsdamer Strasse



unaware of what was going on. Crowds were lining both sidewalks, and police were standing at the curb facing the crowds. While I was standing there cheers could be heard from the direction of the Potsdamer Platz. Soon Hitler's Mercedes approached. Hitler stood in the open touring car giving his customary salute, as shouts of "Sieg Heil" rose to a crescendo from the windows of the surrounding buildings and sidewalks. Years later, it was often said that people were forced into such demonstrations. Whoever started that story did not witness this particular event. No guns were pointed at anyone's head to shout approval, and there was no evidence of any Nazi soldiers behind the crowds. This was an enthusiastic populace showing its support for Hitler. Hitler's car passed about fifty feet from where I was standing and moved at about 15 m.p.h. Dreadful as it may seem, this eleven year old's thoughts were how easy it would be for someone to shoot Hitler.

When school resumed after the summer recess, I attended the only Jewish Middle School left in Berlin. It was located on Linden Strasse which was near the center of the city. I could travel to school by street car which crossed the Potsdamer Platz and took you right through the heart of the city. It was not long, however before I had to start walking, since Jews were prohibited from using public transportation except when going to and from work, and to school only when the distance was considerable, which in my case did not apply. Victoria Strasse was only one block from the Potsdamer Platz. One of the things I remember most of Middle School was our math and physics teacher. I cannot recall his name, he was probably in his early forties, and had come from Vienna. He spoke with



the typical Viennese accent. He also had a doctorate and insisted on being addressed as Dr. which is a typical Austrian custom. What makes him so memorable was that at one point he told us that no one could ever travel into space, that it was absolutely impossible for man to accomplish that, and that such nonsense written by Jules Verne were the product of a diseased mind. He let it be known that if we even dared to bring up such rubbish in class, we would automatically fail! At the school I made a new friend, Stefan Cohn, and we soon became inseparable.

My mother had meanwhile "volunteered" for defense work. Rumors of eventual deportation of Jews started to circulate, and the rumors indicated that those doing defense work would not be affected. She was assigned to the Siemens Wernerwerk at Jungfernheide winding coils. This meant getting up very early, work started at 6 or 7 in the morning. A yellow card allowed her to use the S-Bahn (suburban train) since Siemensstadt was in the Northwestern end of Berlin. The meager wages were paid into a Sperrkonto (blocked account), since we were considered to have too much money. From this account my mother could only draw a certain amount for expenses each month.

Meanwhile my mother had become friendly with a man by the name of Max Aronson who was a real estate broker and administrator. He subleased an office from an Erich Scheffler who was gentile, a member of the Nazi party, though by no means an enthusiastic one. Max and Erich apparently had been friends for many years and Erich did what he could to help him. He had substantial connections in the lower Nazi hierarchy. I will



tell more about Erich Scheffler later, since he played a role in our survival and my becoming Bar Mitzvah.

Max Aronson was very kind to me, and he was very generous, with my mother's money, as I found out much later. He had offered to safekeep some of my mother's black (illegally owned money) in Schefflers safe in the office. My mother was apparently quite gullible when it came to men she liked. She never saw that money again. Aronson would sometimes stay over at Victoria Strasse, and on one such occasion the Gestapo for whatever reason went to search his apartment, I believe that he lived with a sister. Anyway whoever was at home opened the door of the apartment for the Gestapo; and since Aronson was not at home, he had violated the curfew which mandated Jews to be at their homes after a certain evening hour. Shortly thereafter he was arrested and deported to Lotz (Lodz). He was the first individual I personally knew to be deported. Even his friend Scheffler could not save him. Aronson, who had been a veteran of the first world war, was able to send a couple of postal cards to my mother, and then was never heard from again.

My mother still awaited word from Palestine. Some Jews were still able to leave and their departure was handled by the Americans who represented Great Britain after the start of the war. But try as she might our name did not come up.

Prior to the next summer (1942) we children were recruited at school to do volunteer work during the summer vacation. The volunteer work was to



consist of working in the Jewish community soup kitchens which supplied the old-age homes, and deportation centers with food, or alternately to do garden work for the Jewish cemetery at Weissensee. Since I liked the outdoors and enjoyed working with plants, I volunteered with Stefan for the cemetery. A couple of weeks before the summer school vacation it was announced that Jewish schools would not reopen, and our volunteerism become mandated, in effect forced labor. Meanwhile the wearing of the star of David became compulsory. Numerous other chicaneries coincided, such as being allowed to shop for food items only in the afternoon between 2 and 4. The same applied to shopping at a pharmacy. Jews had long been prevented from having telephone service, or going to restaurants. Many stores had also posted "Juden unerwuenscht" ( Jews not wanted) or "Juden verboten" ( forbidden to Jews) signs. This was optional with the individual store owners, and it must be said that many store owners opted for that. It should also be said that there were some store keepers, albeit a small minority, that invited Jews to come in through the rear door, or after dark for their needs. Oftentimes these people would provide items without ration cards, and sell items that were not available to Jews even with ration cards.

My accordion lessons became sporadic and then stopped altogether when Leo was assigned to do forced labor with the Berlin Sanitation department as a garbage collector. At Weissensee there were about 40 of us, the oldest just out of Gymnasium ( high school), I was among the youngest. A young rabbi had charge of us in between officiating at funerals. We were assigned to do weeding, assisting the gardeners, doing



occasional errands. The cemetery which is vast had, of course, no communications and a lot of time was spent looking for people and running around. There was also the occasional soccer game; lunch (mostly a thin potato soup) came from the soup kitchens where some of our former classmates worked.

As summer turned to autumn our tasks involved raking the tons of leaves and carting them off in hand carts. We also covered some of the graves with a winter cover (wide pine branches), when relatives or gentile friends were willing to pay the cemetery for that service. On many occasions we met nuns who would look after someone's grave. Sometimes they would slip us a well stuffed sandwich. One street car conductor made it habit to give one or the other of us a sandwich as we alighted from the trolley at what was then Lothringer Strasse on which the main entrance of the cemetery was located. At times when foundations for gravemarkers were poured, the stench emanating from the partially opened graves was sickening.

We soon had to move from Victoria Strasse, I do not remember the exact circumstances, but the luxurious abode was wanted by some military office or another. My grandmother had meanwhile moved in with us, the Nazis had started to "clean out" the smaller towns, and she was in immediate danger, had she stayed in Fulda much longer. She had previously been forced to give up the apartment where she and David had moved after they got married in 1902, and where my mother had been born. Martha Hildebrandt, her faithful maid, was so distraught over the



whole situation that she decided on entering a convent, and we lost track of her.

My grandmother's presence in Berlin made it somewhat easier for my mother, in that my grandmother did the housekeeping. We first moved to a pension on Kleist Strasse. The pension in this case meant a very large apartment which belonged to a Jewish couple who with help from another Jewish woman provided a quasi hotel service. All the residents with the exception of my mother and myself were old, retired, and in some cases disabled. While my grandmother did our cooking and cleaning, my mother continued her forced labor, and I worked in Weissensee. The atmosphere for a twelve year old was atrocious to say the least. One elderly resident, a Hungarian woman, died while we lived there and I attended her funeral at the cemetery.

After a few months we moved again to Kluck Strasse, a small apartment on the second floor in the rear wing. The worst part of it was that we were now next door to an ardent and vicious Nazi woman. This woman who had once been an ardent communist and had then turned nazi, constantly spied on us and made trouble wherever she could.

Deportations were the rule of the day in Berlin. All those who did not work in defense were in jeopardy. Many of my mother's friends and acquaintances were taken away on an almost daily basis. Some of the children who had worked at the cemetery were soon gone. Many of my former schoolmates and friends departed as well. We had strictly



instructed my grandmother never to open the door and remain quiet in the apartment. This was difficult at best, since our neighbor kept track of our coming and going. When my mother and I came home one evening in the fall of 1942, my grandmother was being taken away. She told us that "they" had rung the bell like crazy, and she opened the door. At that time she was still allowed to pack some personal belongings, a courtesy that was denied later deportees who were dragged away as they were. Her last words to my mother were: " My child we will not see each other again." At that time the arrests were handled by Jews who were employed by the Jewish Community, and were at that point themselves exempt from deportation, so long as "they did their job". The only gentile in the group was the driver, ironically an employee of Scheffler's whose trucks had been requisitioned for this purpose. My mother spoke to him the following day, and he had heard about my grandmother from his driver. Alas he was totally powerless to help. The arrested people were taken to a former Synagogue at the Grosse Hamburger Strasse which served as a collection center before being sent east. The rabbi who was in charge of us at the cemetery, his name was Meyer, also had to work at the Grosse Hamburger Strasse, and through him I had some contact with my grandmother for a few days, and we were able to send her a few items. But he really was not very cooperative, and later joined those who rounded up other Jews, which in the long run did not save him either.

While initially my mother's employment at Siemens provided us with protection from deportation, things changed and even those involved in this kind of work were no longer safe. Ironically now my work at



Weissensee gave us protection. Both my mother and I were issued a "White Paper" indicating that I was working for the Jewish community. It seems that the nazis were concerned with the appearance of Weissensee which was frequently visited by gentiles caring for the graves of former Jewish friends, neighbors, and possibly relatives. Since our group had been decimated, the housekeeping at the cemetery had taken a turn for the worse, so those remaining were provided with this temporary protection. On occasion we were commandeered to one of the nearby nursing or old-age homes to clean up after the occupants had been sent to concentration camps.

My grandmother's sister, Annie, who had been married in Munich was still in touch with us. My mother wrote to her that she intended to go underground with me if at all possible. Annie wrote back that that was "no business" for her. Soon thereafter she was sent to Auschwitz, where she was murdered.

Deportations continued at an ever increasing pace, rumors, some false, some to come true later were proliferating. Many Jews went underground, only to be captured, many others committed suicide. While working at Weissensee I attended numerous funerals of people I had known. My first elementary school teacher, Brigitte Brasch committed suicide with her husband, also a senior high school teacher. Julius Schoenfeld and his wife, a couple my mother had befriended, committed suicide when ordered to report for deportation. He was a lawyer by profession, then the director of the only Jewish hospital. Actually he was



ordered by a gestapo agent to select twenty hospital employees from a lineup for deportation, when he had done so, the agent told him "you are number 21." On occasion a desperate individual would commit suicide at the grave of a loved one. We youngsters were instructed to report to the office at once, should we find a body.

By February of 1943 no one was safe. My mother fearing that I might be taken separately and directly from Weissensee made me stay at home while she continued to work at Siemens. Stefan and I had continued to be close friends and had worked together whenever possible. Without a chance to say goodbye we were forced to separate. He went to Auschwitz, and decades later, by mere coincidence, I came across a biography he had written, under a pseudonym, about his survival. From the description of his background I gleaned who the author was and was able to get in touch with him. Half a century after we worked at Weissensee we would finally meet again during a visit to Israel occasioned by the Bar Mitzwah, at Masada, of my younger son, Stephen.

On the morning of February 27 my mother sprained her ankle on the way to work. She continued on her way, saw the nurse at the plant, and when she reported to her post, her foreman insisted that she could not possibly work with her swollen foot, and that she go home at once. My mother had been on good terms with her boss, and was somewhat surprised at his firmness in sending her home. Within an hour every Jewish worker at Siemens had been taken away. My mother suspicious, but unaware of what was really happening, concealed her star with her



pocketbook as she travelled home. After resting at home for a couple of hours she decided to go and see Scheffler. Scheffler ripped off her star and asked her if she had no idea of what was happening. All defense plants had been raided, and Jews were being picked up everywhere, even right off the street. He told her that we should stay at home for the time being where we were relatively safe, since the main emphasis was on rounding up large masses of Jews rather than individuals, unless they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Above all he urged my mother to stay away from all other Jews, since many were turning in other Jews in a futile attempt to save themselves. My mother was to keep in touch with him by phone, and try to find a place to hide.

My mother had befriended a gentile woman by the name of Margarete Graff. Mrs. Graff had been married to a Jewish dentist. She was a qualified nurse, and had helped her husband in his practice. When her husband died, she rented his office, which was located in her apartment, to another Jewish dentist, a Dr. Bukofzer, also acting as his assistant. For a short time my mother had been a patient of Dr. Bukofzer's. He had recently been deported with his wife and young daughter. The Graffs had no children.

In our building lived a gentile woman who had been taking care of a Jewish architect until he was forced into a nursing home, from which he had been deported. She had been married to an Italian. Mrs. Fontanarosa was very kind to us, and tried to help us from getting deported, she also helped with some food. She knew people at the ration card office, and was able to find out that we would be picked up if we attempted to get our



ration cards, which had to be picked up by a member of the family in person.

On March 5 we went to see Mrs. Graff. My mother asked her to store some personal things for us, and she offered to come to our apartment and pick them up. We preceded her to our building, where Mrs. Fontanarosa was waiting for us. The SS had come to get us. She told us to get some things to take along while she acted as a lookout. In a matter of minutes we packed what we could, loaded up Mrs. Graff and then went to her apartment. We were underground. The haste with which we had to leave was dictated by that Nazi beast next door to us who was home when the SS came, and told them that she would call them as soon as we returned. She also made it impossible for us to return and bring out more things.

Mrs. Graff's willingness to keep us, at least temporarily, offered us some breathing space, but there were some definite risks. First of all her apartment at Luetzow Strasse 85 was only about one block away from our former residence. And our former Nazi neighbor, who obviously recognized Mrs. Graff, was prowling in the area. Ultimately Mrs. Graff's apartment was searched by the Gestapo, but not until we had left there. The second problem was Mrs. Graff's former Jewish husband, which rendered her immediately suspect. She also had a niece who was a member of a Nazi security group, and Mrs. Graff had serious doubts about her. She occasionally came to visit at which times we hid in a walk-up closet which was located above the bathroom. That is also where we slept at night, or went whenever the door bell rang for whatever reason. The



door of the closet was flush and wall papered in such a manner that it blended into the corridor walls. It was overlooked by the Gestapo which was fortunate for Mrs. Graff, since we still had some belongings in there which could have been incriminating. We stayed in Mrs. Graff's apartment except for some forays by my mother to Scheffler. On one such visit she mentioned to him that I would be 13 years old within a month, and what a heck of a way it was to celebrate my Bar Mitzwah. Scheffler insisted immediately that I become Bar Mitzwah. The idea seemed bizarre at best but it really happened.

After the big deportation sweeps had run their course the Nazis instituted a temporary moratorium on deportations. Jews who had escaped the dragnet could reregister with the office of the Jewish community, at which time they would present their identity cards, the outside of which was stamped with the letters 'ERF' for erfasst, meaning registered. The thought behind this was to locate Jews who had been overlooked during the roundups. The idea was definitely not for underground Jews to resurface. My mother at first refused to go for the registration, so Scheffler took us there in person, - he was a determined man. He also put us in touch with a family whose late teen age son gave me a crash course for the Bar Mitzwah. There were still a number of Jewish people, mostly of mixed marriages, holding Sabbath services on Saturday mornings in a chapel in the basement of the Jewish administration building on Oranienburger Strasse and there on May 1, I was Bar Mitzwahed. Scheffler instructed us, of course, to stay in hiding, and not to wear the star, since it was unpredictable when the moratorium



would end. In addition to a festive meal provided by Mrs. Graff, she also presented me the Talis and Machzur from her late husband, which we still own. On the eve of May 1, the German Labor Day then as now, Hitler made one of his speeches at the Berlin Sportspalast to which we listened on Mrs. Graff's radio. In it he ranted "that we must not stop or rest until the Jews and their brood have been weeded out and exterminated." After which the Berlin Philharmonic under Wilhelm Furtwaengler performed Beethoven's Fifth. It was a gloomy omen for the months to follow.

Since it was quite apparent that we could not stay at Mrs. Graff's forever, my mother was thinking of where else we might go. She managed to telephone my music teacher Leo. He lived apart from his wife since his son-in-law, an Italian, who was an assistant to Count Ciano the foreign minister of Italy, was attached to the embassy in Berlin. While the Italians did not at that time act against the Jews, a Jewish father-in-law could be an embarrassment. So Leo had a small room under the roof of a three-family house in Lankwitz, Siemens Strasse 48 located on the southern fringes of Berlin.

My mother was able to reach him at his wife's apartment, and he agreed to meet her. It seems Leo had been picked up during the deportations but was released, like others in similar circumstances, as a result of a public protest by gentile spouses, the only such protest during the nazi era; since he had a daughter raised in the Christian faith, he was not required to wear the star. He did however have to continue working at



the sanitation department, and had also been told that he must arrest and turn in any Jews he encountered, on the pain of immediate deportation. To that effect he carried a special police authorization. It is obvious that he met my mother at great risk to himself.

He never, incidentally encountered anyone, contrary to others in similar situations, who hoped to endear themselves to the Nazis by betraying other Jews. He agreed to try to find us another hiding place. A few days later he introduced us to a couple who could hardly be considered reliable. Our feeling was that they would take whatever they could from us and then turn us in. We sent them away, but since our present location was too precarious, he agreed to share his place in Lankwitz with us.

As I mentioned this was really just a room sandwiched between attic spaces. There was no toilet or bath room. There was no central heat, of course. There was a wash basin outside his room on the stair landing. Its use was, however, very restricted, since anyone of the other tenants could walk up the stairs and notice our presence. There also was a small closet which had a gas burner in it and could be used as a kitchen. During the cold month we spent most of our time in this "kitchen", since it could be heated somewhat. Furthermore there was only one bed. Leo rounded up a mattress, and a commode, which he emptied at night into an outhouse in the back yard. My mother and I shared the mattress on the floor. The building was located across the street from the Loewe Radio Company, which was by then a defense contractor. From the window we had a view



of the Teltow Canal and of the rail tracks for the trolleys which were used to pull barges along the canal.

For the next nine months or so I hardly ever went outside. There was enormous risk in being picked up. There were a few Jews who had made common cause with the nazis, roaming the streets and eating places, looking for illegals to turn in. Leo was able to buy ration tickets on the black market. His wife also provided him with extra food for himself. She had no idea of our existence! My mother and I did some reading of German literature and I had a small crystal radio with ear phone which enabled us to listen to the local station. We read whatever was available, mostly serials in the newspapers, and did zillions of puzzles. The end of the war seemed far, far away. On one rare occasion when we had to go out Leo took us to a public kitchen, a cafeteria style restaurant where you could get a very simple meal without ration cards, for a quick meal. As we entered I spotted the parents of a school friend, Fred Mayerfeld, without him. Apparently they saw me too and virtually ran out of the place without finishing their meal. Of course, I could not talk to them, and I never saw them or Fred again.

But slowly and inevitably the war did come closer to Germany. The air raid sirens wailed occasionally and a lonely bomb was dropped here and there taking down a couple of houses. At that point no one took these raids very seriously. That all changed on the night from August 23 to 24, 1943. Rumors of a large scale raid had been heard by Leo at the sanitation garage. When the sirens wailed at about 2 a.m. we got up and dressed.



Leo went to the cellar, the socalled air raid shelter of the building, but there was nowhere for us to go. My mother was reclining on Leo's bed and I was sitting next to her. Suddenly everything began to shake, and my mother told me to stop shaking the bed, but I was not shaking the bed, the bombs had begun to fall. Leo came up, he had confided to a woman who lived on the main floor. She allowed him to bring us to her apartment where the three of us stood in a doorway for the next two and threequarter hours, in what seemed the end of the world. The sound of breaking glass, the whining of the bombs, the smell of TNT and smoke, doors swinging open and shut on their hinges, the building and ground shaking beneath our feet. Nobody who has not experienced war at close range can comprehend the horror of that night. There was no way we could go into the cellar because of the other tenants, the archway hopefully would protect us from falling debris. In the course of that night nearly 90% of Lankwitz and surrounding area was damaged or destroyed. Fate had us stay in the center of the first major air attack on Berlin.

The reality of this air raid left us with ambivalent emotions. We were on one hand delighted that the war was coming closer, along with the end of the Reich, but on the other hand the raids posed an even greater risk to us than to the German population. If the place where we stayed was destroyed it would be extremely difficult to find another hiding place. It would be even more difficult to replace the few belongings which we needed for everyday survival. A mildly beneficial factor was the fact that the government's attention was focused on relocating the bombed out population and providing for their needs which diverted their attention from



looking for Jews.

This period in Lankwitz lasted for about nine months, until February 1944. During this period we virtually never left the house. We would dream of the future, and a better life. My mother kept telling me that, if we survived, my education would be paid for, with the money she had managed to send to Palestine. Leo came home pretty much at a regular time every day. One evening he came back way past his usual time. He had been picked up by the Gestapo at his job and had been detained. Apparently they had begun to realize that he lived apart from his wife, giving rise to the suspicion that there was really no bonafide marriage to a Christian partner. This subjected him to immediate deportation. His wife was brought down to the Gestapo as well and told that unless she agreed to live together with him he would be deported.

Fortunately she consented to let him move into her (originally his) apartment. While he was not forced to give up his room in Lankwitz, it was no longer safe for us to stay there, since the Gestapo might check up on him. It must be realized what a close call this was for my mother and me. Suppose the Gestapo had decided to pick him up at home, rather than at work, it would have been the end of all of us. This is only one of numerous very close brushes we would have during our underground period. Another worrisome problem arose when my mother discovered blood in her stool. She was naturally very upset, but going to a doctor was totally out of the question. Going to one of the few remaining Jewish physicians married to gentiles, would have endangered them as well as us, and we



could not find a gentile physician who would be willing to see a Jew, and keep quiet about it. We worried about it for a couple of weeks after which it disappeared. My mother was never bothered again by this, but it shows the dire consequences an illness might cause. All in all it was amazing that with the poor nutrition, consisting mostly of potatoes and cabbage, and the lack of heat, and limited sanitation both of us barely had colds during the more than twenty six months of our underground existence. Even though, my mother fell in snow at one point and sprained or possibly broke her wrist which again had to be left untreated.

Things looked very bleak, for it was extremely difficult to find another place to stay. The risks were greater than most people wanted to take, no matter how sympathetic they might be to our plight. When Leo had no luck whatever, my mother went to Scheffler. He had a weekend (summer) home in Wandlitzsee, about 20 miles north of Berlin. For the time being we could move in there. Scheffler who still had the privilege of owning his private car drove us there from his office. There was only one house adjoining his property, where a widowed lady lived with her housekeeper. They were told that we had been bombed out in the city, and since the water in Scheffler's summer house could not be turned on during the winter, we obtained our water supply from the neighbor with a bucket. Also, there was no heat in the building, but we had an electric heater which kept us comfortable. Leo came by train 2 or 3 times a week to bring us food. Also there was a good radio on which we could listen to allied broadcasts. We were also removed from the targets of allied bombings. We could hear the roaring of the masses of allied bombers flying over us



on the way to or from Berlin. But other than a rare stray, the bombs fell a comfortable distance away. Of all our hiding places, this was the most comfortable, and the most relatively secure.

But good things never last long. One day we noticed a man standing outside the locked gate of the property. He looked around, and then left. We were, of course a little concerned, but were sure that he had not seen us. We were inside the building and could see him, but he could not likely see us. The house certainly had an unoccupied appearance.

Several days later Scheffler came up and he looked anguished. The man we had seen was an assistant to Joseph Goebbels, the nazi propaganda minister, who had his own estate not far from Scheffler's. This sidekick of Goebbels wanted to get his family out of Berlin, and since he had to stay near Goebbels, he looked over the area for an unoccupied house. And with our luck he found Scheffler's. He approached Scheffler requesting the use of the house. Scheffler of course wanted no part of this, and told him that he would be happy to let him have his house in the city, while he (Scheffler) was moving to Wandlitzsee. Reportedly Goebbels assistant was not particularly amused by Scheffler's offer. Scheffler of course was within his right, but he had to move to Wandlitzsee at that point, and that meant we had to move out. It was a severe blow to leave the relative serenity of Wandlitz.

On April 17, 1944 we were back in Berlin at Scheffler's office, not knowing at the moment where we might be able to spend the night. Leo



was able to arrange things once again. One of his colleagues at the sanitation department (Ernst Schier) agreed to take us into his fourth floor apartment on Erdmann Strasse 11. The building was a four story apartment house occupied mostly by lower middle income people. Ernst's wife had passed away recently, and he had a son (Wolfgang) who was about 2 years younger than I. Ernst had been a lifelong Social Democrat, and was at that time holding some kind of bureaucratic job in the sanitation depot. He was a thoroughly decent guy, but not particularly averse to doing a crooked thing here or there. His son took a leaf from his old man and became somewhat of an erstwhile juvenile delinquent. He too was very good hearted, but the whole situation was very precarious. I had to be friends with Wolfgang which was not a problem, but I had to be very much on guard since Wolfgang was not supposed to know my real identity. In fact he had been enrolled as a member of the Hitler Youth, but true to his character, he never attended a single meeting. His father, of course did not care, having been totally opposed to the Nazis. At some point Ernst gave me Wolfgang's membership card, and gave my mother the identity card of the German Labor Front to which his wife had belonged. He figured that they might come in handy should the need ever arise - fortunately we never had to test it!!

I had put Wolfgang's Hitler Youth card into my wallet and this almost led to a problem. One day Wolfgang and I were outside the building when a girl from one of the courtyard apartments approached me. We were kidding around a little when Helga who was the epitome of the Aryan girl, strawblond, blue eyed, and a little on the buxom side, with a pretty face,



suddenly put her hand into my pocket - she wanted to see my wallet to look at a picture of my girlfriend! Quite obviously she had taken a liking to me. At first I did not react, then suddenly remembered, in terror, Wolfgang's card. It took some friendly wrestling and kidding around to keep her from getting my wallet. To make matters worse, her father was a minor party functionary. After that I made sure to disappear whenever I spotted her. One day Wolfgang and I went to a barbershop for haircuts. One barber took care of him while the other one worked on me. Suddenly the one cutting my hair asked me quietly whether I was Jewish, which I denied of course. He claimed to be Jewish but gave no explanation. I had a very uneasy feeling about the guy and, of course, never went near there again. Wolfgang apparently was unaware of the conversation. Was he really a Jew who had recognized me from the cemetery perhaps, was he one of those who survived by betraying other Jews, or was he a suspicious German just acting out of curiosity. Since no one in his right mind would admit being Jewish to a stranger, his motives will remain uncertain at best. This incident shows how easily one could get into trouble, and how others were apprehended. I suspect that my being with Wolfgang may have dissuaded him from further questions.

The situation at Ernst's apartment became more complex when he moved in a girl friend, Elizabeth. She had no job, and was probably little more than a member of the world's oldest profession. On the same stair-landing was the apartment of the Muellers. Mr. Herrmann Mueller was a retired bureaucrat but his wife was the local agent of NSV the Nazi women's organization. As block warden she also distributed the ration



cards to the tenants, since we did not get any ration cards we had to concoct a monstrous story, which went something like this. My father was an officer in the army on the western front; our apartment in western Berlin had been damaged during an air raid; we did not want to move to Erdmann Strasse officially, since that meant giving up our right to our apartment, which was only marginally habitable. At one point Mrs. Mueller asked my mother whether she was a member of the NSV, if so could she collect my mother's dues and get the credit for them. Fortunately my mother had said that she was not. Meanwhile the air raids continued by night and day. And everybody met everyone else in the building's air raid shelter, which was a reinforced section of the cellar. The wear and tear of getting up in the middle of the night to go to the shelter was enormous, and even more so on us. Ernst with his devil may care attitude would usually stand on the roof, sometimes with his son, and watch the bombs fall on Berlin. He managed to put out a few incendiary bombs thus saving the building before it was too late. There were a couple of close calls. A building at the end of the block took a full bomb and was instantly converted into rubble. On another occasion a bridge over the railroad tracks, which were only about one and a half blocks away escaped a bomb by only a few inches, the tracks below were replaced by a huge crater. In June came the allied invasion in Normandy and with its success our spirit received a much needed lift. The newspapers headlined the Nazis' promise that the Allies would be driven back into the sea in a matter of hours. With each passing day, as the Allies advanced, we knew that the chances of our survival were improving, but the end seemed too far away. A continent had to be crossed by the western troops, and at times it



appeared that that might take longer than we could hold out.

We got a little respite (vacation) from Erdmann Strasse when another colleague of Ernst and Leo agreed to put us up in his weekend cottage which was in Buchholz in the northern outskirts of the city during June of 1944. While this did not remove us too much from bomb targets, it was a somewhat more secure setup. The cottage had, of course no cellar, so we had to walk to a nearby aboveground shelter. Sometimes the bombs would start to fall before we reached it. The owner of the cottage, a fellow by the name of Ernst Kuhrock, and his brother-in-law, Heinz Rottke had been lifelong communists, and were obviously hostile to the Nazis. Rottke was a printer by profession. The two had helped a number of Jewish people escape to Switzerland by printing forged documents for them and accompanying them to the border. They planned to do the same with us. The idea was that you were sneaking across an unguarded section of the border, dodging the border patrol. The false papers were only intended to identify you as harmless vacationers, should the border patrol catch up with you, since not even Germans were allowed to leave the country without special permit.

Unfortunately a couple Kuhrock and Rottmann had helped previously were very angry when they got to the border and found out that they would have to leave their luggage behind. They wrote a letter to Rottmann threatening to report him to the Gestapo if he did not send their luggage! We never found out whether they actually did so, or whether the Gestapo intercepted and read the letter, but Rottmann was arrested at his job by the



Gestapo - with our forged papers in his hip pocket! Luckily gasoline was already in very short supply even for the Gestapo, so Rottmann was taken on a trolley, handcuffed. He managed to tear up our papers behind his back and stuff them into the trolley seat. He did ultimately survive, but underwent considerable hardship.

It was high time for us to get out of Buchholz, but not before we had a final scare. Leo came to pick us up, and was helping my mother get things together, while I was in the garden. A uniformed police officer appeared at the gate of the fenced-in property, and demanded to see the owner. I went to get Leo who went to talk to the officer. Actually all the officer wanted to tell the owner was that he must have his name posted at the gate, which Kuhrock had neglected to do. Leo told the officer that he was not the owner, but that he would relay the message. The officer marched off and we all tried to stop our knees from shaking.

Then it was back to Erdmann Strasse, where incidentally our last name was Jansen. Ernst had lots of connections through the sanitation garage. On one occasion Wolfgang and I rode with him in a sanitation truck to a hog farm on the southeastern fringes of Berlin, to pick up lard and pork. Also Ernst loved to play card games, and we spent many evenings playing "66". In July was Stauffenberg's failed attempt on Hitler's life. While we were dismayed at the outcome, it did not seem to make too much difference. It was clear that his days were numbered anyway. Our hope was to outlast him. Mrs. Mueller commented at one point that she would not mind watching Stauffenberg and his gang being strung up.



Meanwhile as manpower became scarcer, Ernst who had been draft deferred because of his job faced induction into the military. While he fought it at first, he finally gave up on it because he had gotten himself into some hassle with a fellow worker, and also at Erdmann Strasse. While he had told us that we could stay in the apartment while he was in service, this was a pretty untenable idea, especially in view of the fact that Elizabeth had no other place to stay. In addition the tenant with whom Ernst had had the disagreement chose to name my mother as a witness, so it was time to get out of there.

Our next stop was the small apartment of a Mrs. Christmann. She and her husband had been ardent communists, and she wanted to help us. I do not know where Leo got her from, but it was clear very rapidly that we could not stay with her. The woman was a witch on wheels. She had no children of her own, was obviously scared out of her wits, and drove us crazy. My mother told Leo that she would just as soon turn herself in to the Gestapo than stay one more day with Christmann. So after a few days we went back to Siemens Strasse (Leo's old room). No one had apparently been around to check on him. So with turmoil of bombings by night and day, and bombed out people searching for shelter all over of what was then left of Germany, it seemed pretty safe. But somehow in February of 1945, as the allied troops were closing in on Berlin, the local air raid warden became aware of us, and in spite of the obvious proximity of the end of Nazi Germany, it became prudent one more time to disappear.

There had been in Berlin a mission of the Swedish Church. The



mission enjoyed diplomatic status, and it's pastor, had helped Jews, by providing food, shelter, and even, so the story goes, getting some of them to Sweden. Shortly before my mother made contact with the mission in early 1945, the pastor died in an airplane crash while en route to Sweden, which it was generally believed was engineered by the Nazis. Now contacting the church had some risks. First of all there were some insiders, who while perhaps not pro-Nazi, were at least not too sympathetic to Jews. Secondly, while the mission itself was Swedish diplomatic territory, the Nazis could observe, who came and went. The first time my mother went to the mission, she was received by Father Myrgren, who while not as aggressive as his predecessor had been, was very kind and sympathetic. She returned with a nice package of food stuffs such as we had not seen in years.

One evening in February, when we knew we had to get out of Siemens Strasse, my mother went once again to the mission, more out of desperation than out of real hope. We were so close to the end of the war, and yet there was still a little longer to hold out. As luck would have it, my mother met one of the German women who was an employee at the mission. She volunteered, that her sister-in-law, a Mrs. Eckhardt-Krueger, was leaving Berlin with her small child to join her husband in western Germany. We were welcome to move into her sister-in-law's apartment immediately. Since my mother had felt that it was safer if she went to the mission alone, I waited for her at a nearby street corner. Before she came back the air raid sirens sounded, and when it became apparent that she was staying at the mission's own shelter, I went to a public shelter, really



the reinforced cellar of a nearby public building, since I had to get off the street or risk being asked questions by a patrol.

The shelter, though fairly sizeable, was empty except for about half a dozen middle-aged men and myself. The men were carrying on a lively conversation in one corner of the shelter while I stayed at the opposite end, hoping to be ignored. The men, oblivious to me, were cursing the war, Hitler, and the Nazis, saying that they wished the whole mess to be over, that the Nazis should all be hanged, and on and on. I could not believe my ears, such talk was extremely dangerous. Nazi faithfuls were roaming Berlin, hanging people from street lanterns as traitors and defeatist for saying a lot less than these men were saying. I knew enough to keep a deadpan expression, since it was always possible that one of them was a provocateur who might bring sudden doom upon the others. The all-clear signal was finally given and I headed for a quick departure, when one of the men blocked my way. He said to me: "you got quite an earful here tonight, you are a sensible boy aren't you, and you did not hear anything?" I felt like bursting out laughing, but kept my self-control and assured him that I had not heard anything. He patted me on the head and I was on my way. I was close to fifteen at the time, and would have had to be a member of the Hitler youth. Had this been the case, those men might not have seen the dawn of the next day. Some of these kids turned in their own parents for saying the wrong thing, often with deadly results.

My mother was waiting for me at the appointed corner with the good news, and I told her of my experience. We took the trolley back to a last



night at Siemens Strasse no doubt having the biggest laugh of the entire period. Our next and final stay as undergrounds was Berlin's Lichterfelde district, Gardeschuetzenweg 90 to be exact. But a couple of tough months lay ahead. Our new home was what would now be called a studio, one room, a kitchenette, which also served as vestibule, and a toilet no larger than a closet. The main building was a tenement facing the street, behind it was what had been once a large stable, and attached to it was a two story building with four apartments. Our apartment was on the main floor to the right. Strategically the location was not good, behind our building were railroad tracks, across the street was the Gardeschuetzenkaserne (armory) which housed military units, so our area was quite attractive to air strikes. At the new hideout we adopted the names of the Schiers, since we had at least some sort of identification.

In the beginning, whenever the sirens sounded, we used to track to a public air raid shelter which was about two blocks away on the other side of the railroad tracks. Soon that became senseless, since the skys were virtually open to the allies. The sirens sounded all the time, until they were eventually silenced due to lack of electricity, or damage to the central control points. The western bombers stopped bombing, and Russian fighter planes overflowed the city at rooftop level, at will. Artillery fire could be heard in the distance. Transportation came to a standstill, and Leo who had made frequent trips to us with supplies, soon told us that he could not come anymore until after the battle of Berlin was over. He had decided to stay in his and his wife's apartment to try and secure what he could. Looting was widespread, even though fanatical nazi hordes shot looters at



sight. His wife had decided to join relatives in a suburb south of Berlin.

In Hitler's last, desperate attempt to avoid the inevitable he had ordered the creation of the Volksturm. Teenagers to very old men were forced to "volunteer". This Volksturm (people's troop) received no uniform, there were none of course, and except for a few odd rifles and some anti tank weapons, there were no ammunition and no weapons. One gentleman, probably in his late fifties was "assigned" to guard our little building and more importantly the adjoining tracks. It was quite obvious that he was no friend of the war effort, and quite likely had been no friend of Hitler's. He had already lost his only son to the war. He hung around for a few days then was reassigned, or more likely, decided "to end the war", at least as far as he was concerned. As he left he shook my hand and said to me with a tear in his eye: "I hope you will grow up to be a free man!" I wished him good luck, and sincerely meant it. The Volkssturm, posed, of course, some problem for me, since I was by appearance, at least, of "service" age. Fortunately Wolfgang Schier was two years younger than I, so according to the Hitler Youth membership card I slipped just under the age limit, more fortunately, no one ever asked. Since the liberation was close at hand, we decided that I was to go for a hair cut, which is what I did on the afternoon of April 12. At the barbershop which was close by, on the way to the public shelter, there were the barber and one other man talking. They had the Berlin radio on, which was still working, and as the barber started my hair cut, the news of Roosevelt's death was announced with great fanfare. The two men started an unbelievable tirade against Roosevelt and the American Jews who "controlled" him. They opined that



the Americans would now make peace with Hitler, and Germany would win the war after all. The whole scene was beyond comprehension. Russian artillery could be heard a few kilometers away, Russian bombers were screaming over the rooftops, and these lunatics were still winning the war. This episode more than any other in my experience demonstrates the love affair and infatuation that so many Germans felt for Hitler, and the ingrained, psychopathic hate for the Jews. Naturally, I was quite shook up by Roosevelt's death, as well as the danger which I had been in. My blood must have turned to ice as I sat in the barber's chair. I could not betray any emotion. I am certain that these men would have cut my throat if they had suspected my real identity. It was one last frightful reminder of how hazardous the underground life had been, and why, as we were soon to find out, only about a thousand of the estimated 17,000 underground Jews in Berlin had survived. Even at this late day, fourteen days before the Russian army marched into Lichterfelde, we could still not let down our guard.

The next two weeks were spent in the shelter, which in our case, was the basement below the large stable next to us. Everyone brought mattresses to the shelter, and a certain amount of cameraderie developed. When the lights went out for good, candles were shared, as were trips to a nearby water pump, when city water stopped running. At a nearby street corner, a horse, one of the last modes of transportation, had been killed by artillery, it was carved up and gave many of us a welcome meal. A huge Russian artillery shell, popularly called a Stalin organ because of the warbling sound it made in flight, landed on the roof of the stable but failed



to explode. Had it exploded, no one in the shelter or nearby would have survived. The armory brought much apprehension to all. If the commander decided to follow Hitler's order to fight to the death, God only knows what would happen. Two machine gun groups were emplaced on either side of our main building, and some of the men in the building talked of taking matters into their own hands "to get rid of them". At the final moment the commander of the armory ordered his men to put on civilian clothes and go home. This took enormous courage on his part, since he might have been shot by one of his own men. Many other officers met just such a fate. Here, however, a trifle of sanity prevailed, and, if the rumors were correct, the commander surrendered the armory to the Russians on the early morning of April 26 and was taken prisoner. This was also when we met the first Russians. The war and the flight was over for us. Our luck had held, but the nightmare of the experiences would take much longer to fade. We had to establish a new home, I had to get back to school. About one thing there was no doubt, we wanted to get out of this rotten country, and the faster, the better.

The first troops which came were professional, well trained, and somewhat amused when we ran up to them and identified ourselves. Communications were of course difficult. These fighting troops, however, were soon followed by the backup units, which were rowdy, uncivilized, and intent only on drinking, raping, and robbing. Every woman of every age was in jeopardy. Most of these troops were obviously illiterate, and had no idea of who was friend or foe. They even assaulted Poles and other members of the allied countries who had been taken prisoner by the



Germans and used as forced labor. Once my mother and I were forced at gun point to help tear down a street barricade along with the German population, until we could get the ear of an officer, who spoke a little German and sent us away. Some Russian officers among whom were women, tried to control the rampage, and numerous Russian soldiers were summarily executed for rape by their own superior officers. Other officers on the other hand joined in the misconduct.

At the armory a field hospital had been set up, and since my mother had taken a course to be a physician's assistant in preparation for emigration, I suggested to her to see if they might employ her temporarily in exchange for some security. When we went there, a doctor was sent out to us who spoke some German. When my mother told him who we were he said to us: "I do not believe you, I am Jewish and all my family was killed by the Germans. I do not believe that there are any Jews left." My mother said to him: "But we want to go to Erez (Israel)." When he heard these words, his face lit up and he told us to come in. We both worked there for about a week. I did some little things like taking out the refuse. It was hard work for my mother, but we got some food, and she received a note warning everyone to leave her alone. When the hospital moved on, they told us to follow them, but they could give us no real description of where they were going, so we never saw them again, which was just as well. Some of the Russians did not even realize that they were in Berlin. Things had quieted down a trifle as the troops had moved on. While we were looking for the hospital, we decided to walk farther and see how Leo was doing, but we did not even get halfway there when we were turned



back. The fighting was still raging, and would last several more days. Somewhere along the line a Russian food truck gave us a loaf of dark pumpernickel bread which at that point tasted delicious. The destruction along the way was incredible. Burned out tanks, trolley cars, trucks, and armored vehicles were everywhere, as were cadavers of German soldiers and civilians. The Russians took care only of their own dead. The catenary wires of the trolley system were hanging grotesquely at various levels above the scene of devastation.

After another couple of days Leo showed up. He told us that some of the former communists and other anti-Nazis were starting to set up a kind of governmental administration, and that we should not waste much time getting ourselves an apartment. Apartments which had been occupied by nazis who had fled were up for grabs by people like us. We found a very nice place on Holsteinische Strasse 27, not far from where I was born. Before we moved, however, my mother wanted to find out about leaving for Palestine at once. We had an interview with a Russian commandant in our district. He was very sympathetic and told us that we could leave whenever we wanted to. It was quite clear, though, that he really knew nothing about any procedure, or which way we could leave. Our new home had been vacated by what apparently was a rabid Nazi SS lieutenant. The building super told us that he had wanted him to destroy the place, in fact he himself shot out some of the glass in a vitrine and did other damage. All in all though it was a nicely furnished home and in remarkably good shape. We suspected strongly, that the apartment had originally belonged to Jews, and was taken over by that nazi. We found a



copy of 'Mein Kampf', which apparently had been given to that man by his father. Inside the front cover was a dedication which read in part: "Remain faithful to the Fuehrer and his great movement, even if it costs your life."

Of course, nowhere in Berlin was there any running water, electricity, gas, telephone, or public transportation. It would take many months to restore these. Moving our few things turned out to be somewhat of a problem. The only transportation available were horsedrawn carts, and there were not many of those. We did a lot of walking surveying the ruins of Berlin. We found that Mrs. Graff's home had been destroyed, and for the moment we lost track of her. Kluck Strasse had been destroyed, and our Nazi neighbor was nowhere to be found. We regretted not being able to settle a score with her. Erdmann Strasse was still standing and Ernst, Elizabeth, and Wolfgang were home. Ernst had "ended" the war in the nick of time thus avoiding being taken prisoner of war by the Russians. Mrs. Mueller, now aware of our identity was so happy to see us, and tried to convince us that she had really never been a Nazi. This was a line that we were to hear over and over again by almost everyone. It was truly amazing that there never had been any Nazis at all. We usually made no bones about the fact that we were not buying any of that hogwash.

My old elementary school had survived, and became a meeting place for some of the survivors. The sanctuary on the top floor had had a glass roof, which of course was destroyed, so our old gymnasium on the main floor became the alternate synagogue. A Rabbi Hamburger had survived and conducted services. Even though, fairly young, he had a somewhat



less than charming personality. At one point he made a big hallaballo as to what a disgrace it was that we kids knew next to nothing about our religion. The approximately fourteen kids ranged in age from about six to seventeen. Those of us who were old enough had not been in school for four and a half years, and those of us who were old enough to have attended the school had a pretty good knowledge since religious subjects and Hebrew were part of our curriculum. Anyway in the late fall he started Hebrew school and let it be known that we all better be there, or face eternal damnation. So on a dark, cold night we walked to the school. There were about six of us. There still were no transportation, no street lights, and a curfew was in effect. We stood in the rain in front of the locked door like good little soldiers for about one hour and a half. The rabbi never showed up, and we finally decided that in order to comply with the curfew we'd better head home.

For me it was not too bad, only about a mile walk, but some of the other kids came from much farther away. The good rabbi's explanation was that he did not come because it was raining! Ironically he lived only a couple of blocks from the school. This, then, was my last religious lesson, I was tired of all the hypocrisy I had already experienced in my young years, and even my mother agreed reluctantly that enough was enough. We did attend the high holiday services nevertheless, even though my interest had certainly waned. At one of those services a woman greeted my mother and me, I did not recognize her at first. It turned out that she was the mother of a boy I had been good friends with. Heinz Gross and I



spent a lot of time together, at school as well as outside school. When we moved from the neighborhood we got separated, and I do not recall that he went to middle school with me. Heinz had been sent to Auschwitz with his parents, only his mother survived. Meeting his mother was probably the most painful experience of my life. I felt her gaze on me and knew that she must have been wondering what Heinz would look like had he survived. I did not know what to say to the poor woman. The thought of Heinz and his mother totally devastated me, and I could not come to grips with that experience for a long, long time.

Until the Western armed forces moved in, there was no communication with the outside world, and it took a good while longer for civilians to be able to send mail out of the country. Surprisingly people in the West seemed aware of our survival soon after the war through some of the papers published by Jewish emigrants. So we actually received some mail through the Americans before we could send mail. As soon as mail could be sent, my mother wrote to her cousin Lisel Phillip who as an ardent Zionist, had emigrated to Palestine at the very beginning of the Nazi takeover. Lisel's husband had been a lawyer in Germany and was a lawyer in Palestine. My mother requested that he start proceedings for our immigration. The news we received in return stunned us. Loewensohn had, apparently through forgery, and perhaps through collusions with one or more banks managed to get hold of all of his clients' funds. It seems he had great confidence in Hitler's efficiency and did not expect any of them to survive. No one will ever know how many people he defrauded, or how many perished as a result of his fraud. Besides my mother and myself



there were two other clients of his who survived concentration camps. All the money had been spent, and when Loewensohn found that we were still around he committed suicide. To the disgrace of what was then Israel in the making, neither the state, nor the banks, nor the bar association ever saw fit to make any restitution despite Phillip's and his associates efforts. While it is of course true that Israel had it's own problems in its infancy, there seems to have been no concern about having a few survivors of the persecution victimized once again; after all we were not even supposed to be alive. Ultimately that would mean that I had to work full time and pursue my education in the evening, a very lengthy and tiring process.

My mother had been an ardent Zionist since her youth, and a member of Blau-Weiss (a german Zionist youth organization in the early part of the twentieth century), thus she had alway hoped to go to Eretz Israel. But because of the British policies which were clearly hostile to Jewish survivors, and without any funds in Palestine, there was no possiblity to emigrate legally. After more than two years of illegality we had no appetite for further illegal adventures. We therefore turned our efforts to going to the U.S. This was a long and bureaucratic process. Despite all the documents, witnesses, and American sponsors we had to prove who we were, there were endless investigations by the C.I.D. who seemed convinced that my mother and I were dangerous Nazis. Also since we had taken up residence in the British Sector of Berlin, we were at a disadvantage, because people living in the American sector had priority. Furthermore there was such an onslaught from people of all



denominations from all over Europe, that the consulate was hopelessly swamped. Knowing now, so many years later, that many really vicious Nazis were whisked out of Germany by the U.S. government, makes the difficulties we were subjected to even more incomprehensible. Many new incidents of open anti-Semitism in Berlin as well as a fervent desire to get out of that country made us persevere.

My remaining time in Berlin was spent catching up with my education. For my birthday in 1946 Leo and my mother gave me a new accordion to replace the one that we left behind at Kluck Strasse. Under the auspices of one of the high schools, a Jewish teacher who had been underground herself started a catchup course for some twenty-odd students, most of whom were from mixed marriages and had not been subject to deportation but could not attend school either. We also tried to take in as many cultural events such as opera, theater, and concerts, which started to flourish almost as soon as the guns fell silent. I also witnessed a few denazification hearings. These were tribunals impaneled by the allied authorities consisting of Germans, whose past was supposedly unimpeachable, to judge former Nazis. They could either clear them of any wrongdoing or impose a variety of minor penalties, which consisted mostly of occupational limitations. Their findings were subject to review by the occupying authorities. I found these spectacles to be an appalling charade with friends and relatives of one defendant after another swearing that the individual was never a Nazi and never did anything wrong. It almost seemed that there never had been a Nazi party.



On January 19 1947 we started our journey to America. We went to an UNRRA camp in Berlin from which we were taken by train under military guard through the Russian zone to Bremer Haven. There a few days later we boarded the SS Marine Perch which, after a very rough crossing, lasting fourteen days, landed us in New York on February 11, 1947

In a strange roundabout way it was really a homecoming. You see my paternal grandfather had been a U.S. citizen. He came to the United States as a young man, participated in some gold prospecting, worked for the Singer Sewing Machine Company, and was naturalized in October of 1869. He returned to Berlin to marry my grandmother and wanted to bring her back to the U.S. Alas my grandmother who with her family had been driven out of Russia by the programs, wanted to stay in Berlin. My grandfather loved America and remained a citizen for the rest of his life. He died in 1917, and before my grandmother died, in 1933, she destroyed all her personal papers, so as not to "burden" her children with them; included were my grandfather's citizenship paper. Ironically she had correctly predicted some of the excesses that were to follow.

Since it would have been fairly simple for my father and his sisters' families to immigrate to the U.S. if they could have proven that their father had been an American citizen, my father made every attempt to verify his father's citizenship. The American embassy and consulate in Berlin insisted that the American government kept no records of naturalization proceedings, and nothing could be done to confirm my grandfather's citizenship.



A few years after I came to New York, I mentioned that to an elderly lawyer for whom I occasionally repaired his radio and TV sets. He said to me: "Don't you believe that! If your grandfather was naturalized, then somewhere there is a record of it." He made some suggestions, and the next time I was called for jury duty in lower Manhattan, I pursued the matter. After a false start at the Federal Court Building I was sent to the County Clerk's Office, where it took less than five minutes to establish the pertinent facts about my grandfather's citizenship. After the sunshine law became effective I was even able to obtain a copy of the document. Were the American representatives in Berlin so ignorant of their government's procedures relating to immigration and naturalization, or was it part of an anti-Jewish immigration policy? The experiences of others who tried to come to the U.S. seems to suggest the latter. This also helps to explain why so many perished, and so relatively few were fortunate enough to survive.



## POSTSCRIPT

This is a record of what happened to some of the people who helped us survive.

Erich Scheffler who had been wounded in combat during World War I, he had a deep gouge in the top of his skull, was shot by Russian soldiers while he was trying to inveigh against the rapes that were being perpetrated. He had helped a number of Jews survive, which became well known in postwar Berlin, but regrettably he did not live to receive the recognition which he deserved.

Mrs. Graff lost everything except her little dachshund as a result of an air raid. She was relocated into a small furnished room in Spandau, in the west of the city. We saw her a number of times before leaving Berlin, and were in touch with her from New York, but soon received word that she had passed away.

Ernst Schier was in investigative custody by the time we left Berlin. He had apparently been caught redhanded. He was ultimately released and we were in touch with him a few times. In one of his last letters he wrote to us that Wolfgang was in jail in East Berlin.

Through malice over some argument with a third party Leo's wife, Emmy, was informed that he had helped us survive. He had successfully kept it from her until after we were in the U.S. While she was not too upset



at the fact that he had helped us, she was quite distraught by the fact that Leo had not been able to save his own brother, his wife, and their little daughter to whom Emmy was particularly attached. This was a reaction which Leo had predicted, and was the primary reason he had kept it a secret. This totally unnecessary tragedy put a strain on what had not been a great marriage for a long time. Leo wrote to us several times to New York. He mentioned that he had gone back to visit Leipzig where he grew up and found the place ripe with anti-Semitism. He was also bitter that he could not get permission from the authorities in Berlin to go to Italy and visit his daughter, while, as he mentioned in one letter, the Nazi actor Veit Harlan was travelling all over Europe under American auspices. A little later we received a letter from Leo's brother-in-law that Leo had died from "Staupe", a canine disease, which I believe is similar to rabies. I was never able to find out how that came about, nor do I know whether he ever saw his daughter again.

